



The Miracles of Æsculapius.

BY WALTER WROTH.

AN Athenian worthy named Chremylus, has the good fortune to capture the blind God of Riches. Chremylus being a poor but deserving man, ventures to entertain a hope that the god would distribute his favours more equally, if only his eyesight could be restored. It was in Athens, and in the age of Hippocrates; but Chremylus scorns to consult a regular physician, and, after making some satirical remarks on the medical profession and its emoluments, decides that he cannot do better than take his blind divinity and lay him on a bed in the temple of Æsculapius. To the Athenian temple of Æsculapius Plutus is accordingly taken. And here, when it has grown dark, and the lamp has gone out in the sanctuary of the god, a strange scene presents itself. All around are the recumbent forms of men and women, afflicted with various diseases; each one awaiting the midnight Vision of Healing which the God of Medicine is to send. The malady of Plutus is shared by at least one other patient in this bizarre assembly, by a certain politician named Neoclides, who is blind, but who, we are told, outdoes in stealing even those who can see. When all is quiet, the priest of the temple comes in, and goes from altar to altar collecting the figs and cakes which have been offered by the faithful—offerings which he proceeds to consecrate by depositing in a sack for his own eating. Last of all appears the God of Medicine himself; and he, after going the round of his patients, and making a gum and vinegar plaster for Neoclides, restores the eyesight of Plutus.

This is not a scene in Cloud Cuckoo-Town, but (due allowance being made for caricature) one from actual Athenian life in the fourth century before our era. That the ancient Greek slept in the temples of Æsculapius in order to obtain a cure is well known to us from several sources, and, in fact, the remains of the Athenian temple itself have been discovered in our own day on the southern slope of the Acropolis. On this spot the spade of the excavator has brought

to light not only the temple and its adjoining buildings, but also some of the objects once actually offered to the god by grateful patients—votive tablets, for instance, on which may still be seen depicted processions of men, women, and children approaching to the God of Healing and his family. Even documents of the temple, such as the inventories of the votive offerings, have been unearthed. From these we may learn how the blind man dedicated a model—sometimes in gold or silver—of an eye; the lame man, the model of a leg; and the long list of votive ears and mouths and noses and fingers furnishes an index, only too complete, to all the ills which flesh is heir to. Mingled with the models of human limbs are other thank-offerings of the most varied nature—mirrors, and vases, and coins, and gems, and even cheap jewellery, under which head it is curious to find the mention of an iron ring: the reader of Theophrastus will remember that it was a ring of bronze which the Fussy Man dedicated in the temple of Æsculapius, and which he was always coming to visit and rubbing bright with oil.

Excavations of a still more recent date than the Athenian ones—those conducted by M. Kavvadias at Epidaurus in the Peloponnese—have thrown much light, during the last two or three years, on another great centre of Æsculapian worship. Not even the temple of Æsculapius at Athens in the fourth century B.C., nor that at Pergamon in the days of Aurelius and Caracalla, could vie for fame and sanctity with the temple at Epidaurus. Epidaurus was the metropolis of Æsculapian worship, and even the Athenian and Pergamene cults confessed that they were offshoots of her parent stem. About Epidaurus there clustered legends of the infancy of the God of Healing, and in its temple stood a famous statue of the god, by the artist Thrasymedes, probably a follower of Phidias. That statue—made of gold and ivory—has long since disappeared; but coins of Epidaurus, preserved in the museums of London and Berlin, still convey some notion of its original form. A great theatre constructed by the sculptor Polycleitus gave further *éclat* to the place; and even when Greece had lost her autonomy, the Emperor Antoninus constructed at Epi-

daurus new buildings for the God of Medicine and his patients.

It was in the second century A.D. that the Greek traveller Pausanias visited Epidaurus, and wrote a full description of it, which we now possess. One curious circumstance he especially noted—the presence within the sacred enclosure of six stone pillars (*stelæ*) inscribed in the Doric dialect with the names of sick persons of both sexes who had come as suppliants to Epidaurus: in addition to the names were recorded the nature of the disease and the manner of the cure. An unsuccessful attempt has lately been made to prove that Pausanias did not always see with his own eyes the things which he professes to have seen. Certainly the theory of compilation “from an old guide-book” will not hold good for Epidaurus, as may be judged from the following interesting little detail. In one passage of his *Periegesis* our author takes occasion to mention a town named Halike, which in his own time was deserted, but which, he tells us, was certainly once inhabited, because on the *stelæ* at Epidaurus, which recorded the cures (*ιάματα*) of Æsculapius, he had noticed the name of an inhabitant of Halike. It is strange that after the lapse of centuries the Epidaurian excavations should have revealed not only the buildings within the sacred precincts of Æsculapius, but also one of those very six *stelæ* bearing an inscription in the Doric dialect, and headed “The Cures (*ιάματα*) of Æsculapius,” and that among those cures should appear the name of “Halketas, an inhabitant of Halike.”

The inscription on this *stèle* forms a record of twenty miracles of healing performed by Æsculapius at Epidaurus. The writing, which is extremely clear, is of the fourth century B.C., or of the early part of the third century. The details of the cures themselves may, however, have been handed down by tradition from a still earlier period.* Each miracle has a heading

* The original text of this inscription has been published by M. Kavvadias in the *Ἐφήμερις ἀρχαιολογικῇ*, 1883, p. 199, ff., with a commentary in modern Greek. M. Salomon Reinach has recently printed a translation of it in the *Revue Archéologique*, with which I have compared some parts of my own version. Another similar *stèle* was also found by M. Kavvadias in his excavations, but it is still unpublished. I need hardly apologize, perhaps, for calling the god Asklepios in this article by his more familiar Roman name Æsculapius.

or short title, such as “Nicanor, a lame man,” “Hermodicus of Lampsacus, an impotent man,” “Thyson of Hermione, a blind boy;” and it was probably well known under that name to the worshippers of Æsculapius. Each entry furnishes—as Pausanias had already noticed—the name of the suppliant, and states briefly the nature of his malady, relating in greater detail the *modus operandi* of the god in effecting the cure. It appears that the suppliant slept the night, not within the temple, but in a kind of dormitory in the sacred precincts, where he was favoured by a vision, in which he beheld the God of Healing. It is usually during the progress of this vision that the miracle takes place; and in the morning the patient wakes up to find himself cured. Of course only the successes are recorded; and many of the narratives conclude with a regular hieratic formula: “And when it was day he went forth whole.” Of the most important of these miracles I will now give a translation, or a paraphrase; but before proceeding we may notice that they furnish additional evidence of the fame of the Epidaurian god; for though among the cured are natives of the place, yet many of them come from a distance—from Athens, northern Greece, and even from the western coast of Asia Minor. The patients, it would appear, made no prolonged stay in the sacred precincts, but slept there only for a single night; and this sufficiently shows that the temples of Æsculapius differed in the most essential point from modern hospitals. Our inscription further shows that, at any rate at this period, the Epidaurian temple had hardly even the character of a dispensary. There are grounds for supposing that the priests of Æsculapius were not by any means always chosen from the ranks of the medical profession; and though they probably had some tincture of medical knowledge, and were able to, and did occasionally, prescribe a rational treatment for the suppliants, it is plain that the God of Healing disdained the vulgar aid of liniments and potions:—

Οἶκ' ἦν ἀλέξην' οὐδὲν, οὔτε βρώσιμον,
Οὐ χριστόν, οὔτε πιστόν—

and it was to the faith and to the imagination of his patients that he trusted for the accomplishment of his cures.

We will begin our account of the miracles by selecting one of the most curious and elaborate. It is called the miracle of "Pandarus of Thessaly, the man who had marks (*στίγματα*) upon his forehead." This man, having lain down to sleep in the *abaton* (or dormitory), had a vision. It seemed to him that the God of Healing tied a bandage over the marks, and commanded him when he had gone forth from the building to take off the bandage and dedicate it as an offering in the temple. When it was day, Pandarus got up and took off the bandage; he then saw that the marks were removed from his face, and dedicated the bandage in the temple. This miracle has a sequel. A man named Echedorus, probably a neighbour of Pandarus, was visited with the same misfortune, and likewise came to Epidaurus for a cure. Pandarus, who had not forgotten the favours of the god, had given his friend money to dedicate in the temple. This money, I may remark, was not merely to be dropped into the Æsculapian offertory-bag, but was to be solemnly placed as an *anathema* in the temple. Such dedicated coins were marked in a particular way, and were kept among the other votive offerings, often with a record of the donor's name. This man Echedorus slept in the *abaton*, and had a vision. It seemed to him that the god appeared and demanded of him whether he had received any money from Pandarus for dedication. Echedorus replied that he had not—he had received nothing of the kind from Pandarus, but if the god would heal him he would dedicate to him a statue. The god then proceeded to bind over his marks the bandage that had been worn by Pandarus, and commanded him on leaving the *abaton* to take off the bandage, to wash his face in the sacred spring, and to look at himself in the water. When it was day, Echedorus went out from the building and took off the bandage. Now the bandage had had impressed upon it the marks which had come off from the forehead of Pandarus, and when Echedorus looked in the water he saw that he had the marks of Pandarus in addition to his own, which he still retained.

A man named Æschines wishing to see into the building where the suppliants were

lying climbed up into a tree. It was now dark, and probably Æschines began to doze; at any rate, he managed to fall from his tree right into the quickset hedge of the place,—a fence of stakes,—and, literally, scratched out both his eyes. Blind, and suffering great pain, he went as a suppliant to the god, slept in the *abaton*, and was healed.

Euippos had had for six years a spear-head in his jaw; while he was sleeping in the *abaton* the god drew out the spear-head and placed it in his hands. When it was day Euippos went forth, carrying the spear-head in his hand.

Heraieus, a man of Mytilene, had no hairs on his head, though he had a great many on his cheeks; or, to state his case in the language of the modern hair-dresser, he was bald, but had luxuriant whiskers. Being annoyed at the jests of which his appearance was made the subject by other people, he went and slept in the *abaton*, and the god, by anointing his head with a certain remedy, made his hair to grow.

Euphanes, a boy of Epidaurus, being afflicted with a grievous malady, slept in the *abaton*. It seemed to him that the god appeared and said to him, "What will you give me if I cure you?" "Ten knuckle-bones," answered the child. The god laughed, but said he would heal him; and when it was day he went forth whole.

Another boy, who was dumb, came as a suppliant to the god, and made the usual preliminary sacrifice. One of the temple-servants, turning to the boy's father, inquired of him if he would promise to offer a sacrifice within a year in return for a cure. But the boy, suddenly finding his voice, exclaimed, "I promise." His father in astonishment bade him speak again, and the boy spoke again, and from that moment he was cured.

Hermodicus of Lampsacus, an impotent man, was cured by the god while sleeping in the *abaton*, and was ordered on going out to carry into the sacred precincts the largest stone that he could lift; in fact (adds the inscription), he brought in that big stone which still lies before the *abaton*.

The next miracle to be related is that of "a man of Torone who swallowed leeches." This man, while sleeping in the *abaton*, saw a vision. It seemed to him that the god cut

open his breast with a knife, took out the leeches, gave them into his hands, and then sewed up his breast again. When it was day the man went forth cured, having the leeches in his hands. He had been led into swallowing the leeches by the perfidious conduct of his step-mother, who threw them into a beverage that he was drinking.

But the healing powers of Æsculapius found scope for their exercise even in the case of *inanimate* objects, as witness the following story:—A certain youth was going down to the temple of Epidaurus, carrying in a bag some of his master's property, among which was a *kothon* or cup of earthenware. When he was about ten furlongs from the temple he had the misfortune to fall, his burden with him. For this constant servant of the antique world, the breakage of his master's china seems to have had in it an element of seriousness which it has no longer for the modern domestic, and it was with real grief that he perceived that the *kothon*, the very cup from which his master was accustomed to drink, was broken. He sat down and began to try in a hopeless manner to put the pieces together. At this juncture there came by a certain wayfarer, who, on seeing him, addressed him thus:—"Wherefore, O miserable creature, are you vainly endeavouring to put together the pieces of that cup? why, not even Æsculapius, the god of Epidaurus, could mend its broken limbs!" Having heard this, the lad put up the fragments in his bag, and proceeded on his way. On reaching the temple, he once more opened the bag, and, behold, took out from thence the cup, made whole. The servant told his master all that had been said and done, and the master dedicated the cup to the God of Healing. This is called the miracle of the "*Kothon*."

The god does not necessarily effect his cures by means of a vision, and we find that a blind boy named Thyson was cured by one of the dogs belonging to the temple licking his eyes. Another suppliant had a painful ulcer similarly healed by one of the sacred serpents of the temple. It is worth noticing that in Aristophanes the blind god Plutus recovers his eyesight through two serpents of Æsculapius licking his eyelids.

Among the other miracles, which need

only a brief mention, are two curious cases of women who receive the obstetric aid of the god after the birth of their children has been abnormally delayed. The offspring of Cleo, one of these ladies, proves himself to be an infant of no ordinary spirit, for immediately on seeing the light of day he walks to the sacred spring and gives himself a bath. The story of Nicanor looks as if it might be an incident borrowed from the every-day life of the temple precincts. Nicanor, a lame man, was one day quietly seated, when a boy stole his walking stick, and made off with it; the lame man got up, ran after the boy, and from that moment was healed.

I will conclude this account of the Epidaurian cures by referring to two which, in some respects, are the most interesting of all, because they show us, what otherwise we should hardly have suspected, that even by the ordinary Greek the temple-records of the Æsculapian miracles were sometimes called in question. That such scepticism was widespread among the people there is no reason for believing, but its occasional presence should certainly be noted, partly because it is curious to find that even the humble layman of antiquity had his "difficulties of belief," and partly lest we should form an exaggerated notion of the piety of the ancient Greek. In one of these instances, a man with paralyzed fingers comes as a suppliant to the god, but before lying down in the *abaton*, he sets to work to examine the votive tablets in the sacred precincts, expressing his mistrust as to the cures, and depreciating the inscriptions. Still more curious is the appearance of a "female Atheist," an Athenian lady rejoicing in the pleasant name of Ambrosia, but having only one eye. She, too, came as a suppliant to the god, but before proceeding to rest began to walk about the sacred precincts, and mocked at some of the cures as "all fudge and quite impossible," (*ὡς ἀπίθαρα καὶ ἀδυνάτα εἶντα*); "for how," she asked, "could lame men walk and blind men see, merely through having beheld a vision?" It is needless to add that both she and her companion sceptic were convinced by the god of the powerful medicinal qualities of the Æsculapian vision; and of both it is recorded that when day came they went forth whole.

One very odd detail is added about Ambrosia. She is ordered by Æsculapius to dedicate in his temple a silver model of a pig. This animal, whether as a votive offering in stone, terra-cotta, or metal, or as an actual sacrificial victim, is often met with in connection with Greek worship; but here the familiar offering is specially "applied" to a particular suppliant, for Ambrosia is told to dedicate the pig "because she had displayed such stupidity," or, as we should say, had shown so much pig-headedness.

Such are the miracles of Æsculapius. And it is difficult to part from them and all their quaintness and old-world simplicity in any very critical or serious spirit. Yet the student of ancient medicine, and, still more, the student of comparative religion, will regard these wonders as being something more than the mere curiosities of old Greek life. For they will recognize in them (and hardly without a sigh for human weakness), yet one more page added to the long catalogue of wonders which are no wonders, of miracles wrought without conscious imposture, related without conscious exaggeration, and believed by the multitude, *quia impossibilia*.



Notes from Cornwall.

BY REV. W. S. LACH-SZYRMA.

THE very interesting and important work of Dr. Mitchell, *The Past in the Present*, is capable of expansion and support in many places besides the Highlands of Scotland, where Dr. Mitchell mainly founded his theories.

I would briefly, in this paper, catalogue a few of the primitive usages surviving in Cornwall, which seem to bear on the Past in the Present, and of which I can find illustrations on the European Continent.

1. The clan theory of society. This tribal or clan idea, the next stage after the primitive family, Sir H. Maine and others have proved to be a characteristic of primitive Aryan society. The clan preceded the nation. Now, though, in most civilized countries, *e.g.*, in our midland or home counties, the clan idea is extinct, or nearly so

it is not so either in the Scottish Highlands or in Cornwall. Researches into the vestiges of clans in Cornwall, the noticing of characteristics in physical aspect, in habits, in customs among the populations of certain villages or hamlets, would, I am certain, show the traces of common descent, the family having developed into the gens or clan. The custom of intermarriages in the village tend to confirm and fix these local peculiarities. In this matter the Cornish is very like the Slavonic village.

A curious point in the Cornish clans is, that, like the American clans, they retain often a nickname, and that is usually the name of an animal. Thus we have the Mullion "gulls" for the inhabitants of Mullion near the Lizard, the Zennor "goats" for the people of the Zennor region on the north coast of the Land's End peninsula, the St. Ives "hakes," the Sancreed "hogs;" just as among, say, the Wyandots of America we have the deer gens, the bear gens, the turtle gens, the wolf gens, etc. This represents a survival of a very primitive instinct of mankind, quite extinct in most parts of Europe. The fact that many of these nicknames may be modern does not affect the interesting point of the survival of the instinct.

2. Then the nature worship which had so prominent a part in ancient Europe is not extinct in Cornwall. The greeting of May or Spring with horn-blowing exists in Oxfordshire, and was once probably common in England, but nowhere is it so lively as in Cornwall. In fact, the custom, like many others, has degenerated into a nuisance, or something like it. The boys blow horns and the girls sing, crowning themselves often with flowers and garlands. May customs, however, have a great persistence throughout Europe, probably from their beauty.

The midsummer fires, in honour of the summer solstice, which are so common in out-of-the-way parts of Europe, in Russian forests, on the Carpathians, on the Apennines, on the hills of Brittany, and by the fjords of Norway, but which have nearly died out in England, are common enough in the Land's End district, nay, perhaps in no town in Europe are they better kept up than in Penzance, where the Midsummer revels—the dancing with fire-torches, and the bonfires in the

streets—bring one back to the scenes of mediæval or ancient Europe, in a way that few scenes in England can do.

But this is not all. In Cornwall we have the variant on the primitive custom which arose in the Middle Ages of renewing the midsummer fires on the eve of the great feast of the prince of the Apostles, St. Peter. The Peter-tide fires still, as five centuries ago, illumine on St. Peter's Eve the shores of Mount's Bay.

3. On this occasion, also, another primitive custom (which has more vitality than others in many parts of England) is sometimes followed, of burning in effigy in the Peter-tide fires those who have been marked out for clan disapprobation. (A case occurred not long ago, not a hundred yards from where I write these words, of a man's effigy being burnt as a punishment for an offence.)

The enforcement of tribal justice as distinct from the law of England is another survival, and one which often makes the duties of recorders and judges in Cornwall very light, as, in fact, this tribal justice, a mild, but not less feared, representation of Judge Lynch, has a salutary effect on public morals. The fact is, the population (or, if we may so say, the clan) punish offenders, and practically make the place too hot to hold them. It would seem that exclusion from tribal privileges was a much dreaded punishment among the Ancient Britons, and probably the Cornish inherit the feeling as the Irish do.

4. It might be supposed that in England all memory of the heathen gods (save such as school boys and girls get out of books) would have passed away; yet I have known children afraid to go by night near a certain carn, *i.e.* Tolcarn, for fear of the Bucca-boo (the Cornish Neptune or sea and storm-god), who was, in the Middle Ages, like most heathen gods, described as a devil. Also at St. Just, in spite of Chaucer's dictum in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* as to the extinction of fairies, I have heard of two men who assert that they have been troubled by Cornish piskies on the moors. We are here brought into contact with very primitive ideas—the last vestiges of the beliefs of Ancient Britain in the ages of Julius Caesar or Suetonius.

5. Some domestic customs, also, are primitive. The usage of the farmer or the master

dining with his servants survives in many places. Just as the baron dined in his hall with his retainers, so some Cornish farmers dine with the farm servants, the men sitting on one side, the women on the other. Even the custom of sitting above and below the salt is, as I understand, retained by a few.

Reviews.

Records of the Borough of Nottingham, being a series of extracts from the Archives of the Corporation of Nottingham. Vol. ii. (London and Nottingham, 1883: Quaritch; and Forman & Sons.) 8vo. pp. xx., 509.



SINCE the publication of the *Remembrancia* of the City of London, we know of nothing that has appeared from municipal archives of so much value as these volumes from Nottingham. And in one sense they are even more valuable than the London volume. Nottingham is one of those boroughs whose history has a peculiar place in the history of towns, and Mr. Freeman has more than once set this forth and explained it. Up to the present we have had very little information about municipal Nottingham, except what would be gleaned from local histories, and, accordingly, these valuable publications come upon us somewhat in the light of a revelation. In our review of the first volume (see *ante* vol. vii., p. 148) we spoke of the peculiar value of these archives for municipal history, and although the second volume is equally valuable, we think it would be best to draw attention to its interest for social and domestic history. We must express our regret that our notice of it has been so long delayed.

Among the most interesting documents are the appraising of the goods of certain individuals for legal purposes. These papers give us some kind of idea as to the domestic utensils and furniture of the age. In 1403-4, January 30th, the goods of Robert de Burton, glover, are appraised. They consist of a great chest, another chest, a screen, a small meat board, a form, a trestle, two old vats, two empty barrels, five fish-panniers, three pairs of scissors, a fish knife, four saucers of tin, six dishes of wood, a brass ladle, a powder box, two platters, and a pot-lid of wood, an old candlestick of wood, a pair of bellows, two surcingle, two forks, a halter, a cover, two canvas bags, an old canvas, a chair, a cage with a throstle, a flask, a pepper quern, an old cushion, and a cheese beck. If these make up the domestic furniture of those days, it does not appear that the luxury of Nottingham was excessive. Another description of goods in 1441-2, February 8th, is more interesting perhaps, and it introduces a curious female Christian name, Emmota, which we do not remember

